

Although the ARRL has done yeoman service to the amateur radio community for many decades, it is sometimes left behind in the somewhat fierce progress we have seen in recent years. The senior officers are primarily from the East and Midwest and have quite properly long histories as hams. Unfortunately this can lead to a tendency to respond with a quick negative when faced with changed conditions.

My first point is the requirement of element 1. I have had amateur radio license for about twelve years and spent most of that time working with my local RACES/ARES organization and the local Office of Emergency Services. I have lived through four major earthquakes, 9/11, and any number of lesser disasters in this area. I have never seen Morse Code used as a disaster communications means under any circumstances, here or anywhere else.

I have also managed three Field Day operations for local amateur radio groups. Each time, we have had to almost kidnap someone who would work the ham bands using Morse Code. Despite the big talk, almost no one actually uses it these days.

As far as "talk to interesting foreigners and broaden your perspectives" goes, although I am only a working engineer in Silicon Valley and certainly not wealthy, my kid has been to Europe as a teenager along with any number of her friends. We all have experience with cell and satellite phones and the world is available to us on the Internet and TV on a routine basis. I normally watch news broadcasts from the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and a Korean station, all from the countries involved and all in English. It simply is no thrill to call someone in Bulgaria or Singapore and chat in this age, and even the idle curiosity isn't worth learning Morse code when SSB works as well.

In sum, there is no reason to require any Morse code knowledge from a radio amateur. It is simply an interesting anachronism, like double-sideband AM or teletype on a "real" mechanical teletype machine.

My second point is the matter of an entry license. The ARRL would like to see a new 'Novice' license to enable beginners to get into ham radio more easily. As far as I can see, we already have one: the present Technician license. It allows a beginner to get on the air with others like him or her and talk! Our newby doesn't have to deal with crusty old goats on HF who haven't learned anything since they drew a pentode power amp for their General ticket and he or she can learn by doing on two meters and the ARES/RACES nets, SKYWARN, or just chat without competitive fuss. My point in paragraph four (above) also applies: the present generation is not impressed with dit-dahs to far places when they have been there and talked to the locals in person, then come home and swapped Internet mail with them. It's a lot more fun to work a network of hams in all the local hospitals as a RACES drill, or to rework a "Dish System" antenna to send and receive 2.4 Ghz amateur TV.

I won't weigh in on changes in the amateur HF bands because I am not sure they make any significant difference to most hams. The major changes that are needed are simply the loss of Morse Code as a requirement and the establishment, once and for all, of the Technician license as an entry to amateur radio. I await your final decision with great anticipation.

John A. Amos